

IOWA APPLIED HISTORY SERIES

EDITED BY BENJAMIN F. SHAMBAUGH

Applied History

BY

BENJ. F. SHAMBAUGH



Monograph

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PREFACE

As an introduction to the *Iowa Applied History Series*, of which the first volume and reprints therefrom appeared in 1912, there was issued a brief pamphlet explaining the nature and purpose of the series. That pamphlet, which appeared under the title of *Applied History*, is now reprinted as an introduction to the series of reprints from the second volume of the *Iowa Applied History Series*.

BENJ. F. SHAMBAUGH

OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT AND EDITOR
THE STATE HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF IOWA
IOWA CITY IOWA

APPLIED HISTORY

AMONG citizens, law-makers, and public officials there is a wide-spread desire for better government, better laws, better civil service, and better methods of public administration in general. As citizens, law-makers, and public officials we are all alike deeply concerned in the vital questions of political, industrial, and social welfare. We may confess ignorance in regard to some of these matters; and at times we may feel that, along with the rest of the world, we are hopelessly groping in the dark. But not one of us is at heart really indifferent to the problems of human betterment — although it is true that our desire for better things, both for ourselves and for others, invariably outruns our knowledge of how wisely to bring them to pass.

Real advancement is so elaborately slow that we find it difficult at times to resist the temptation to take short cuts to progress. There are so many obstacles on the road to social betterment, so many petty mistakes and so many temporary failures on the journey, that we sometimes lose heart and despair of ever reaching the goal. Fortunately, however, no amount of delay and no number of mistakes can ever wholly extinguish our zeal for real progress; and healthy-minded men and women will continue to view failures as the inevitable accompaniment of forward movements. To them every step, whether on the greensward or among the thorns, is a goal attained.

As practical, common-sense people we are eager to know more about this journey toward social betterment upon which we find our generation embarked. What are the problems of the way? On what stage of the journey are we at this moment? How far have we gone? Whither are we tending? What were the experiences of those who preceded us? How fares it with others who are now traveling toward the same goal? And finally, how in the light of all these facts may we improve our means of travel, overcome obstacles, and accelerate our speed?

To speak more directly, as practical citizens, law-makers, and public officials we demand reliable and complete information concerning the public questions which now confront us and which we are called upon to solve as best we can. For example, we desire exact and full information on such questions as home rule, the initiative and referendum, equal suffrage, the selection and removal of public officials, the merit system, pension systems, the regulation of public utilities, child labor, and poor relief.

Moreover, the data and other information sought with reference to these questions are, first of all, the plain facts gathered through careful investigation from the history of our own State, from contemporary experience in other States, and from selected foreign sources; second, the expert interpretation of all the facts collected; third, the expert definition of regulation, legislation, and administration; and, finally, the application of these standards of legislation and administration to existing needs and conditions.

It is to supply citizens, law-makers, and public officials with just such data and other information that The State Historical Society of Iowa has undertaken to compile and publish a series of papers under the title of "Applied History"—which may be defined as the use of the scientific knowledge of history and experience in efforts to solve present problems of human betterment. As thus defined Applied History comprehends impartial investigation, scientific interpretation, and expert definition and application of standards: it frankly recognizes the fact that public service to be efficient must be guided by open-minded experts—by men governed by knowledge, reason, and high-mindedness.

Applied History views the past as a vast social laboratory in which experiments in politics and human welfare are daily being set and tested on a most elaborate scale. Moreover, in this human laboratory the conditions are *real* conditions, the factors are *real* men and women, and the varied relations and combinations or conditions and factors are always those of *real* life.

Now it is evident that nowhere have the conditions for social and political experimentation been more varied nor the results more accessible than in our own American Commonwealths. Here the records are marvelously rich in experiments in civil and criminal law, in the application of constitutional limitations, in labor legislation, in the regulation of common carriers and public utilities, in taxation, in the administration of roads, in domestic relations, in the protection of women and children, in the conservation of health, in the maintenance of

order, in the exploitation of natural resources, in the promotion of industry, and in the democratization of education and politics. To wisely use the results of all these experiments in efforts to solve the problems which confront each generation is to carry out a program of Applied History.

Applied History is simply the use of the creative power of scientific knowledge in politics and administration. Scientific farming has greatly increased the yield of the soil. Scientific mining has greatly increased the output of the mine. Scientific forestry has greatly conserved the woodlands. Scientific hygiene has greatly conserved the health and life of the people. Scientific engineering has overcome the most stubborn obstacles of nature. Can any one doubt that some day scientific history, scientific legislation, and scientific administration will be able to boast of a similar record of accomplishment?

The foundation upon which Applied History rests is the scientific law of the continuity of history—a law which asserts that “every human institution, every generally accepted idea, every important invention, is but the summation of long lines of progress”. Indeed, it is the recognized validity of this law that affords substantial assurance that Applied History is not a dream but a sound and intelligent method of interrogating the past in the light of the conditions of the present and the obvious needs of the immediate future to the end that a rational program of progress may be outlined and followed in legislation and administration.

Applied History is, indeed, the natural outcome of scientific history, itself the inevitable result of the development of the newer anthropological studies — especially archaeology, ethnology, sociology, politics and administration, economics, comparative religion, and social psychology. In fact, these social sciences, which have developed so marvelously under the inspiration of the doctrine of evolution, have involved historical study in a revolutionary process which is giving birth to a “New History”.

The first advances of the social sciences were opposed by the more orthodox historians: they seemed fearful lest the encroachments of anthropology, archaeology, sociology, politics, and economics should turn them out of doors. But it is now apparent that, upon second thought, they are wisely resolving not to resist but to make use of the new sciences in the development of new viewpoints in history.

It is commonplace to say that we are in the midst of new conditions: every one seems to be more or less conscious of the fact that times have changed. Moreover, with a knowledge of man and of the world immensely greater than ever before “society is to-day engaged in a tremendous and unprecedented effort to better itself in manifold ways.” Mankind has, indeed, embarked upon a career of social readjustment in the course of which history is to serve as “a guide-post to betterment” rather than a “barrier cast across the way of progress”.

Henceforth the New History, leavened and enriched by the products of political and social science, promises

to play a much more important rôle in the intellectual life and progress of mankind. The past will be brought into direct relations with the present; and the "fitting intervals" by which historians have separated their studies from the near-at-hand will disappear. The present, which "has hitherto been the willing victim of the past", will now "turn on the past and exploit it in the interests of advance"; and historians who have hitherto entertained "other notions of their functions" will "furnish us with what lies behind our great contemporaneous task of human betterment".*

History, like all other studies, has constantly undergone changes — changes in subject-matter, changes in methods of investigation, changes in presentation, changes in viewpoint, and changes in interpretation. Indeed, it may be said that no phase of man's record has been fully and finally written. Even the manuscripts of the most critical are already worn with erasures or blurred with corrections. Old versions are revised, and new chapters are added; and the latest chapter in the history of historical study is what has above been defined as Applied History.

For untold ages of biologic time man's progress was recorded only in his animal body — a most fascinating source-book of origins but recently discovered. Moreover, it is a remarkable fact that the discovery of this record of man's earliest and most ancient history was made not in the library by historians, but in the labora-

* See James Harvey Robinson's *The New History*. This is a most stimulating collection of essays illustrating the modern historical outlook.

tory by students of natural science — by Darwin and Haeckel, by Wallace and Weismann, by Spencer and Huxley: names still unknown to the literature of much orthodox history.

With the development of the art of language, history first appears as oral tradition; then as a literature of story and mythology; and finally as a more prosaic record of things that actually occurred. In recent times historical study has become more and more scientific: not content with finding out what has actually transpired, historians have seriously endeavored to explain how in fact things have come about. And now in our own day — as if in response to the spirit of an age that likes to call itself practical — history becomes up-to-date by bringing itself down to date, and ventures to suggest a program of what should come to pass on the morrow. That is to say, it is now proposed to apply the scientific knowledge of history in working out a rational program of human progress in government and administration.

Nor should the relations of education and Applied History as joint agents of social betterment be overlooked; for the battles of real progress have always been won by the forces of education — especially higher education. In this connection it is worth remembering that in Iowa we have a State-supported University with a College of Applied Science, and a State-supported College of Agriculture and Mechanic Arts with an Experiment Station and a Highway Commission. Is there any good reason why we should not have in this State a College of Applied Political and Social Science with a de-

partment for the extension of political education? The successful operation of such a college would certainly help to make our State a better place to live in politically and socially. Moreover, such a college, with courses correlated with the applied sciences of engineering and medicine, would be in a position to furnish the trained experts whose services are so necessary to efficiency in public administration. Why should the State afford special facilities for training lawyers, doctors, engineers, agriculturists, and dairymen, and at the same time neglect the training of men and women for public service?

It is utterly futile for us to talk about high-minded citizenship and ideals in public service without seriously endeavoring to provide that special training which will make men really capable and efficient public servants. Field work is as important and short courses as practicable in politics and administration as in agriculture and the industrial arts.

State institutions, like high-minded citizens, should be dominated by a zeal for public service: they should show a lively interest in the public welfare. And so, in bringing the history of our Commonwealth down to the present hour, in conducting scientific researches along lines of political, economic, and social developments, and in projecting a series of publications on Applied History, in which the language of the scientific investigator is translated into more popular form, The State Historical Society of Iowa aims to make a direct contribution to the public welfare by linking the public with the results of scientific research in political and social science.

To outline and conduct investigations for purposes of Applied History is a difficult and exacting task. Research is always serious business. But when the results may possibly be used as a basis of constructive legislation, the investigation must be thorough, impartial, accurate, and scientific to the last degree. There must be no superficial examination of the sources, no intellectual juggling with complex data, no smothering of undesirable facts, no partisan presentation of the truth, or shallow expediency in the handling of difficult and delicate problems.

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